

SECTION

4

COMMUNITY VIEW

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Community involvement and input is important throughout the entire planning process. This is especially true during the initial stages of plan development. During this period, the focus of the plan is to develop the background and framework from which the plan subsequently evolves. Some of the steps in this process include describing the current demographic and economic status (Section 2: Socio-Economic Analysis), identifying the natural features and physical environment of the community (Section 3: Physical Features), and, perhaps most importantly, identifying and understanding the community's

development issues and identifying the community's desired characteristics for future development (Section 4: Community View).

To identify the development issues and the desired future (values) on which the plan should focus, Polk County actively engaged residents in various community involvement activities. The purpose of the Community View section of this plan is to identify the community involvement activities and to summarize the input that was received from each of these activities.

Community Involvement Activities

It is important to remember that the community involvement process is on-going. The community involvement activities undertaken to develop this section of the plan are only the first steps in an on-going process and only reflect the activities that have been engaged in for this purpose. Future community involvement activities will be necessary to develop the plan and to successfully implement any recommendations of the plan.

Thus far in the development of the plan, community involvement activities have been used to effectively gather public input about the current nature of, and desired future for, growth and development in the County. This input provides valuable guidance for the various committees and staff that are responsible for the development of the plan and, subsequently, the development of any of the tools used to implement recommendations of the plan (such as revisions to the zoning ordinance). Input received for this part of the planning

process forms the basis for understanding the community's beliefs on the type, amount, and location of growth and development that has been acceptable and unacceptable. And, about their future desires for the way in which development should occur and what types of management activities could be used to guide this development. This input provides the foundation for determining what issues the plan should address and how residents expect their community to guide future growth and development activities.

The following is a description of community involvement activities that were conducted and a summary of the input that was received from each activity.

 Citizen Opinion Survey

 Town Kick-Off Meetings

 Focus Group Sessions

CITIZEN OPINION SURVEY

The main instrument used to obtain the public's beliefs on the way in which growth and development should occur and the elements of the county that they believe should be preserved, was the Polk County Citizen Opinion Survey. The purpose of the survey was to assess opinions about development in Polk County and provide guidance in developing goals and implementation strategies for the plan.

The survey contained a total of 41 questions and an area to provide written comments.

The survey asked varying questions about the seriousness of problems related to growth and development and questions that assessed the various methods and techniques related to the management of growth and development.

A total of 300 random telephone surveys were conducted with County residents comprising a representative sample of Polk County residents.

The following are the results of the survey.

POLK COUNTY CITIZEN OPINION SURVEY SUMMARY

Completed November 18, 1997

-  Preserve and protect productive farmland from non-agricultural related development.
-  Preserve and protect the land owners right to sell their land for uses other than farming.
-  Continue to allow single-family housing development in the rural areas of the County.
-  Limit multi-family (duplex, townhouse and apartment) housing development in the townships. Multi-family housing units for the elderly are more acceptable.
-  Have more restrictive land use regulations in shoreland areas than in other areas of the County.
-  Residents are pleased with the way land has been used for growth.
-  Land use policies and regulations (zoning) should be used to preserve and protect the rural and agricultural character of the County.
-  Land use policies and regulations (zoning) should be used to preserve and protect the environmental areas and corridors.
-  It is necessary to develop a policy to direct where commercial and industrial development should occur.
-  Zoning ordinances should be enacted to control growth in the townships.
-  The majority of the residents believe there is a problem with the pollution of lakes and streams in the County.
-  It is important to preserve and protect wetlands and environmentally sensitive areas in the County.
-  Roads and highways adequately meet the needs of citizens and businesses in the County.
-  Additional parks and recreational areas and public access areas to lakes and streams are not needed in the County.
-  Generally, Polk County residents believe economic growth and development is occurring at just the right rate.

TOWN KICK-OFF MEETINGS

During the months of May-July 1998 Polk County staff visited each of the towns in order to discuss the development of the plan and to get some initial feedback on their local development issues and concerns.

Sessions were held with representatives of each town. Each group discussed the purpose of the plan, the nature of development that was occurring in the towns and the current type and location of land uses.

FOCUS GROUP SESSIONS

In addition to general, countywide, involvement, the County also decided to gather input directly from representatives of various stakeholder groups. Six groups were identified that represented major stakeholders in the county. The six groups represented Agriculture; Transportation; Economic Development & Tourism; Natural

Resources, Parks & Water Quality; Housing; and Land Use & Zoning. The role of each group was to discuss the current status and desired future of their area of interest in Polk County.

The following is a summary of the interest groups discussions.

AGRICULTURE FOCUS GROUP ISSUES

- Concerned about the conversion of productive farmland into non-farm uses.
- Landowners and farmers should have the right to sell their land.
- Alternative programs to conserve farmland, such as the purchase of development rights, could be considered. However, it is important to decide who will pay for these types of programs.
- Some areas of the County should be preserved for farmland and open space.
- Farmers should not be heavily regulated. New homeowners in rural areas should be educated on farm operations before they buy a home.

TRANSPORTATION FOCUS GROUP ISSUES

- In general, County roads are adequate to meet the needs of citizens and business. However, at certain times and at certain locations there is too much traffic resulting in unsafe and dangerous conditions.
- In general, Township roads are in good condition and meet the needs of citizens and business.
- A County road classification system should be implemented in order to help address priority road, number and placement of allowable access points and other operation and maintenance types of decisions.
- Roadway design and layout should be adequate to accommodate school bus operations.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT & TOURISM FOCUS GROUP ISSUES

- Economic development and tourism can help promote growth in Polk County.
- Responsibility of economic growth and tourism promotion should be shared between all levels of government (state, county, towns and cities) and the private sector.
- Polk County should take only a limited role, if any, in the development of local industrial parks.
- Polk County should have restrictions on signs along major roadways.
- Infrastructure costs should be shared between government and industry.

NATURAL RESOURCES, PARKS & WATER QUALITY FOCUS GROUP ISSUES

- Polk County does not currently have a lot of water contamination.
- The County should adopt a lakes classification system.
- Landowners should not be allowed to fill wetlands for development.
- Shoreland and environmentally sensitive areas should be preserved. However, it must be determined how to pay for preservation efforts.
- Farmers should be only modestly regulated.
- Polk County should have more parks.

HOUSING FOCUS GROUP ISSUES

- Generally, there appears to be a housing shortage in Polk County.
- Generally, new rural housing developments should be located closer to incorporated areas.
- Impacts fees should not be charged.
- Polk County should not adopt a dwelling code.
- Polk County should support high-density housing with appropriate green space.

LAND USE & ZONING FOCUS GROUP ISSUES

- Land use controls should be more restrictive in shoreland areas than non-shoreland areas.
- Restrictions on the type of shoreland uses should be imposed.
- Variances should be allowed, however, current variance criteria should be reexamined.
- All land uses should be allowed in rural areas. However, some control over location and intensity should be maintained.

CONCLUSION

Obtaining community input is an essential element in the planning process. This provides the basis for decision-makers to determine where the community wants to be and how the community wants to get there.

Community input is critical to the development and implementation of the plan and any management tools that are used to implement the plan. It is also essential as an on-going activity to assist in monitoring and evaluating whether the existing management tools are effective in

meeting the existing goals, and whether the goals are still the desired future outcome.

As stated earlier, the activities used to involve Polk County residents have been completed for the purposes of gaining input on the current issues and concerns associated with growth and development activities and identifying the desired future landscape.

The summaries of these activities helped to identify core issues, concerns and values that were consistently expressed by residents in the County. The following is a general summary of these issues, concerns and values.

-  Preserve and protect natural resources and environmentally sensitive areas.
-  Preserve and protect the various water resources (lakes, rivers, streams, wetlands and groundwater).
-  Maintain natural and scenic qualities, and rural character of the County.
-  Preserve and protect community interests without over-regulation.
-  Preserve and protect productive farmland from non-farm related development.
-  Limit scattered commercial and industrial development.
-  Develop and implement fair planning and zoning policies and ordinances to manage growth and development.
-  Do not implement excessive land use regulations.
-  Preserve the rights of property owners.
-  Maintain existing park and recreation areas.
-  Have more restrictive land use regulations in shoreland areas than in non-shoreland areas.
-  Continue good management practices of streets and highways.
-  Manage, but do not restrict, the amount and type of rural residential development.

These recurring "themes" will provide the basis that will guide the decision-making process in the development and implementation of the plan.

